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ABSTRACT

This study (N=103) sought to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the art criticism abilities of an experimental group of preservice elementary teachers who had received supplemental instruction in visually analyzing works of art and the art criticism abilities of a control group who had not received the supplemental instruction. An instrument developed for the study, the Visual Assessment Inventory (VAI) was used to evaluate achievement. Each item in the VAI dealt with the identification, description, analysis, and interpretation of the visual element found in one painting, Edward Hopper's "November, Washington Square." A color slide of the painting was shown during the administration of the test and subjects were asked to select the correct answer from four possible responses to each question about the painting. The supplemental instruction provided for the experimental groups consisted of the six art criticism lessons developed for the study. The VAI posttest results provided empirical evidence that subjects receiving instruction in visually analyzing works of art scored significantly higher on measures of aesthetic awareness than those who did not receive the instruction. (JD)

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A COMPARISON OF THE ART CRITICISM ABILITIES OF PRESERVICE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS BEFORE AND AFTER RECEIVING INSTRUCTION IN ART CRITICISM TECHNIQUES

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Introduction and Background

For more than two decades art educators have stressed the need for a more comprehensive approach to the art curriculum. While traditional creative art activities remain central to the field, the importance of also including experiences in art criticism has been increasingly recognized. Students will continue making aesthetic decesions throughout their lives. Only a small percentage, however, will create art works after leaving school (Broudy, 1979).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress: Art Objectives (1971) and the National Art Education Association (1973) have long supported the need to include art criticism as a part of the art curriculum. More recently, the Getty Center for Education in the Arts (1985) has also endorsed the study of art criticism as being crucial to obtaining a meaningful education in the visual arts.

When students receive training in visual analysis (art criticism), they have a much greater array of information with which to work. These students are better prepared to observe details and identify relationships as they interact visually and cognitively with the world around them (McFee, 1961). Well-developed habits of seeing can influence the rest of their lives. A long term goal of visual sensitivity is the education of an aesthetically literate population which is concerned with the quality of the visual environment. The judgements they make concerning the aesthetic merit of art works and the world in general are based on knowledge and awareness rather than ignorance or personal preference (Barnes, 1987).

Art educators agree that the development of art criticism

skills should begin at the elementary school level. Some children will receive their art instruction from an art specialist. The majority, however, will have art lessons conducted by the regular classroom teacher. As with any new methodology, the teaching of art criticism will only be effective to the extent teachers understand and assimilate it into their teaching practices (Mitchell, 1965).

Prospective teachers develop their views concerning the relative importance of the visual arts in the school curriculum during their undergraduate teacher training. In general, the preparation which most elementary teachers receive in their college art courses is aimed only at the productive realm of art education (McLaughlin, Thomas & Peterson, 1984). A more extensive background in art teaching methodologies is needed to adequately prepare classroom teachers in accomplishing today's broader objectives for art instruction.

Several authors have recognized the need for a change in the makeup of art methods courses. Chapman (1971) stated that educators now realize that meaningful art programs should include instruction to help students make informed artistic judgements. Eisner (1972) concluded that art criticism skills are not necessarily a benefit of learning to create art objects. Mittler (1980) reported that many art educators now challenge the belief that a full understanding of art can be achieved through a program focused solely on the development of creative abilities.

Before changes can be implemented in the content of art methods courses for elementary school teachers, more empirical research is needed to establish the benefits of a comprehensive art curriculum. An expanded approach to art instruction cannot be sufficiently advanced until additional research information has

been gathered. Included in the types of research needed are studies dealing with the effectiveness of courses which are available to general classroom teachers during their college study (McLaughlin, Thomas & Peters, 1984).

This study addressed the concerns stated above. First, the study developed an instructional model for classroom practice which can serve as a guide to future research. Secondly, the study tested the theory that the art criticism skills of prospective classroom teachers can be signifcantly increased through instruction in visually analyzing works of art.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the art criticism abilities of an experimental group of preservice elementary teachers who had received supplemental instruction in visually analyzing works of art and the art criticism abilities of a control group of preservice elementary teachers who had not received the supplemental instruction.

Research Design

The research design used for this study was the quasi-experimental nonequivalent control group design. This design is widely used in educational research since it is often necessary to study intact classrooms (Campbell & Stanley, 1966). Four intact classroom units comprised the sample for this study. The experimental and control groups each consisted of two individual classroom units. The independent variable was the supplemental art criticism instruction.

The study was further designed to test the influence of the teacher variable. Three instructors participated in this study. The first instructor taught one class in the control group. A second instructor taught one class in the experimental group.

Instructor three taught one class in the control group and one class in the experimental group.

Selection of Sample

Subjects for the study were elementary education students enrolled in a college art methods course at a state university. Four sections of the course were offered. Two of the classes participating in the study attended class during the day schedule. The remaining two classes met during the evening schedule. The control and experimental groups each consisted of one day class and one evening class. A total of 103 subjects participated in the study. The control group contained 51 subjects and the experimental group contained 52 subjects.

Instrument

Commercially available tests for art education research are in short supply. Since 1966 more than a dozen art educators have devised instruments for their specific research purposes (Clark, Zimmerman, & Zurmuehlen, 1987). The Visual Assessment Inventory (VAI) used in this study was developed by the researcher.

Each item contained in the VAI deals with the identification, description, analysis, and interpretation of the visual elements found in one painting, Edward Hopper's November, Washington Square. A color slide of the painting is shown during the administration of the test. Items are presented in a multiple choice format. Subjects are asked to select the correct answer from four possible responses to each question about the painting.

The construction of items for the VAI was based on the method for teaching art criticism developed by Feldman (1970) and the elements of art and the principles of composition outlined in Fundamentals of Art, Theory and Practice (Ocvirk, Bone, Stinson, & Wigg, 1975). Responses from a panel of five art educators were

solicited to establish the content validity of the VAI. The panel's recommendations were incorporated into the instrument before it was administered in a pilot study. The revised edition of the VAI contained 47 items and was named VAI 1.

The pilot study to test the reliability and validity of VAI 1 involved 108 preservice elementary teachers in three groups with varying degrees of exposure to art criticism instruction. Construct validity of the instrument was supported by positive correlations between the group means and the amount of prior art criticism instruction (see table 1).

The Kuder Richardson 20 formula was used to calculate the internal consistency of the instrument. Reliability coefficients derived by this formula are generally lower than those obtained through other methods. As such, they tend to be minimum estimates of reliability and reduce the danger of overestimating an instrument's reliability. The reliability coefficient obtained by this method was .74.

Statistical analysis of the responses to individual items on the instrument revealed a negative discrimination index for three of the items. These three items were subsequently removed from the instrument and were not included when scores were tabulated for the pilot test. The second revision of the instrument contained 44 items and was named VAI 2.

Materials

Six art criticism lessons were developed for this study. Five paintings and one print were selected from the Instructional Resources section of Art Education. Four art works are reproduced in each issue of the journal. Accompanying each reproduction is a one page narrative to be used by teachers in preparing lessons dealing with the work of art. Information from the narratives was

combined with the researcher's observations of each reproduction to structure the art criticism lessons.

Procedures

During the eight week treatment period, subjects in the experimental and control groups received equivalent instruction with one exception; the experimental group received supplemental instruction in art criticism techniques. Otherwise, all classes utilized the same text and followed a common course syllabus.

The supplemental instruction provided for the experimental classes consisted of the six art criticism lessons developed for this study. A slide image of the art work being critiqued was projected onto a screen at one end of the classroom. During each lesson the instructor led the students in a discussion involving identification of the art work, description and analysis of the visual aspects of the art work and possible interpretations of the art work.

Collection of Data

Data for this study were collected through the administration of a pretest and posttest. VAI 2 was used as the pretest. Subjects in both the experimental and control groups completed the pretest at the beginning of the semester. At the completion of the eight week treatment, both the experimental and control groups were administered VAI 3 as a posttest. VAI 3 contains the same items as VAI 2; however, the order of placement of the items is different.

Treatment of Data

Analysis of covariance was selected as the statistical model for this study because iwas not possible to randomly assign subjects to the experimental and control groups. According to Kerlinger (1974), when it is necessary to study intact groups,

analysis of covariance is the most appropriate statistical model. By residualizing posttest scores using pretest scores, the degree of error variance is substantially reduced.

Results and Conclusions

Table 2 (see p. 9) shows the adjusted posttests means for the experimental and control groups. The adjusted posttest mean for the experimental group was 26.17 and for the control group was 22.75. When the adjusted posttest mean scores for the experimental group and the control group were compared, the analysis of covariance model yielded an F ratio of 16.60 which was greater than the critical value of an F ratio of 8.24 with 1 and 102 degrees of freedom needed for significance at the .001 level. On the basis of this comparison, it was concluded that the treatment variable was effective in increasing the art criticism abilities of the experimental group.

Table 3 (see p. 9) shows the pretest and posttest means and standard deviations for each subgroup's performance on the Visual Assessment Inventory. The pretest means for each class were similar. No significant differences were found among the pretest means for the four classes.

An examination of the posttest means showed gains for each of the four classes. The posttest means for classes 2 and 3 (experimental group) were, however, higher than those of classes 1 and 4 (control group). Posttest means of the two classes in the experimental group were not found to be significantly different. Likewise, no significant differences were found between posttest means of the two classes in the control group. On the basis of these comparisons, it was concluded that the teacher variable was not a significant factor in the outcome of the study. The supplemental art criticism lessons developed for this study proved to be equally effective when utilized by two different teachers.

Discussion

Art criticism has been recognized as an important aspect of a meaningful education in the visual arts for students at all grade levels. Improving the art criticism skills of prospective elementary school teachers is an important link in realizing the goals for art education. Without adequate experiences in learning how to look at works of art, elementary classroom teachers are not likely to include art criticism activities as a part of their art instruction. The college art methods course seems the logical place for prospective classroom teachers to acquire the skills necessary for teaching art criticism concepts. This study provides empirical evidence of one instructional method for increasing the art criticism skills of preservice elementary school teachers. When subjects received instruction in visually analyzing works of art, they scored significantly higher on measures of aesthetic awareness than subjects who did not receive the instruction.

An additional contribution of this study was the development and validation of the Visual Assessment Inventory. Most instruments concerned with measures of aesthetic awareness require subjects to identify the major visual characteristic in a number of different art works. The Visual Assessment Inventory developed for this study took a different approach. Subjects were asked to respond to 44 questions about a single work of art. The intent was to measure the subjects' abilities to respond to the variety of visual aspects in one work of art. The capacity to distinguish the many subtle qualities in a single work of art would seem to indicate greater aesthetic awareness than simply being able to identify the dominant visual aspect in many art works.

Table 1

Summary of Pilot Test Group Means

Group	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D.
1 (no instuction)	26	20.15	4.08
2 (limited instruction)	45	23.24	4.57
3 (additional instuction)	37	26.91	4.09

Table 2

Comparison of Gains in Art Criticism Abilities for the Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Adjusted Mean	F
Experimental	52	26.17	
Control	51	22.75	
			16.60 *

* $p < .001$ ($F \geq 8.24$)

Table 3

Pretest and Posttest Means and Standard Deviations for Group Performances on the Visual Assessment Inventory

	Pretest			Posttest		
Group	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D.
Class 1 (Control)	23	21.61	5.84	23	23.65	4.50
Class 2 (Experimental)	28	20.86	3.34	28	26.00	4.32
Class 3 (Experimental)	24	19.92	4.73	24	26.25	4.58
Class 4 (Control)	28	20.59	3.89	28	22.11	4.49

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